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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000274

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [JA](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Playing hardball, Tigers continue to ramp up the pressure in the north and the east

Refs: (A) Colombo 261; (B) 02 Colombo 1246

(U) Classified by Lewis Amselem, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: In the wake of recent incidents involving the military, the Tigers continue to ramp up the pressure in the north and the east by instigating numerous rallies and general strikes. The GSL and monitors are working to calm the situation. In a rare event, recent LTTE activities have put it at odds with a normally friendly Tamil party. Through their latest mafia-type activities, the Tigers are clearly sending a message to the government that it should deal with the group very, very cautiously. END SUMMARY.

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Ramping Up the Pressure
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2. (C) The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) continue to ramp up the pressure in the north and the east. Based on the LTTE's public announcements, the latest activities form the group's hard-line response to two recent incidents pitting LTTE cadre against the Sri Lankan military. (Note: The first of these incidents took place on February 7, and involved the interception of a LTTE arms resupply boat by the Sri Lankan navy. The second incident took place on February 12 when the Sri Lanka Army stopped LTTE cadre in Jaffna and ordered them not to wear military-type uniforms -- see Reftels. End Note.) In protesting these incidents, the LTTE has sponsored the following major demonstrations and general strikes in the past several days:

-- On February 14, several thousand Tamils marched in Jaffna town. The march was basically peaceful, but there were several small clashes with police and the army. The marchers presented a petition to the local SLMM office complaining about the military.

-- On February 17, the LTTE called a general strike in Trincomalee District in the east. Many shops were forced to close. In addition to the two incidents reviewed above, demonstrators were also protesting the arrest of two LTTE cadre allegedly involved in recruitment in the Trincomalee area. The two cadre were granted bail later in the day.

-- On February 17, several hundred pro-LTTE demonstrators marched in Vavuniya, a town in the north-central part of the country.

3. (C) In addition to these large events, the LTTE has sponsored smaller anti-government rallies in other parts of the north and east. In the meantime, according to contacts, the situation in Jaffna on February 18 is said to be tense, with the army and the police strongly in evidence. The LTTE has also announced that it is sponsoring a general strike in Jaffna District on February 19. Tamils are being asked to wear black armbands and to fly black flags during the strike.

(Note: The latest tensions seem to have no direct relation to an incident on February 16 in which a Sri Lankan army soldier was killed by LTTE gunfire while crossing into the group's territory on the Jaffna Isthmus. The incident appears isolated, with the soldier apparently acting on his own. The army is investigating.)

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GSL, Monitors try to Calm Situation
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4. (C) In response to the LTTE's activities, the government and the Norwegian-run Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) are working hard to calm the situation. As touched on in Ref B, the GSL has announced that it is launching an investigation into the February 12 incident, including reviewing the actions of the army

and the police. As for the monitors, Hagrup Haukland, the SLMM deputy, told us that the group was meeting with government and LTTE officials "multiple times every day" to ensure that both sides understood their responsibilities under the terms of the February 2002 ceasefire accord. Haukland allowed that the situation in the north and east was quite tense at this time, but said he hoped that SLMM efforts would help lower temperatures soon. Haukland noted that the SLMM had been able to broker an understanding between the government and LTTE that Tiger cadre would not wear military-style belts in government-controlled areas. At the same time, the GSL had agreed to contact the SLMM to report alleged Tiger transgressions and not to try to enforce the understanding on uniforms itself.

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LTTE Tensions with Tamil Party

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15. (C) In a rare event, recent Tiger activities have put it at odds with a normally friendly Tamil party. According to contacts, many members of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), a major constituent element of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), are furious with the LTTE for its successful effort to postpone the reopening of the Jaffna library planned for February 14 (see Ref A). Those who are said to be angry with the LTTE include V. Anandasangaree, the leader of TULF and a senior TNA MP. Also at odds with the LTTE are the former mayor of Jaffna and the former TULF members of the Jaffna Municipal Council, all of whom resigned their positions on February 13 in reaction to the postponement. (Note: The resignations were largely symbolic, as the five-year terms for the mayoral and municipal council seats run out this week in any case.) In press statements, Anandasangaree and the other TULF officials have underlined that they wanted the library reopened as soon as possible and did not appreciate the LTTE's strong-arm efforts to cancel the February 14 ceremony. (Note: It is not precisely clear why the LTTE did not want the library to reopen, but -- in line with its ongoing protests against the military -- the group apparently did not want any outward signs of GSL-Tamil amity at this time.)

16. (C) Commenting on the LTTE-TULF dustup, Kethesh Loganathan, an analyst at a local think-tank, told us that he was not sure how serious the split might turn out to be. He commented that Anandasangaree has always been considered more independent of the LTTE than some other Tamil political leaders (also see Ref B on this point). That said, he thought that Anandasangaree would be careful not to antagonize the LTTE too much given the group's reputation for retribution. Loganathan went on to remark that the LTTE had to be careful to ensure that it did not alienate Tamil politicians, especially during the ongoing peace process when it needed to show the world a more moderate face. (Note: There are reports that the LTTE has asked major Tamil party leaders to visit the LTTE-controlled Wanni region later this month for discussions focused on the peace process.)

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COMMENT

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17. (C) As reviewed in Reftels, the LTTE has been steadily expanding its influence in the north and east, often employing mafia-type tactics of intimidation and extortion in the process. Through their strong-arm tactics in Jaffna and elsewhere of late, the Tigers are clearly sending a message to the government that it should deal with the group very, very cautiously. It is not clear how long and how hard the LTTE intends to press the GSL and the military at this point, but most observers believe the group does not want to undermine the peace process. At the same time, the Tigers will have noticed that they have provoked a bit of a backlash among Tamils, a development which may or may not cause the group to back off somewhat. As for the GSL, it is being very careful not to allow the LTTE to provoke more incidents. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

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